

Cross Family House
911 E. Madison Street
Brownsville
Cameron County
Texas

HABS No. TX-3273

HABS
TEX,
31-BROWN,
5-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20243

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. TX-3273

CROSS FAMILY HOUSE

HABS TEX, 34-BROWN, 5-

(Formerly HABS TEX, 30-BROWN, 5)

Location: 911 East Madison Street, Brownsville, Cameron County, Texas.

USGS East Brownsville Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 14/650580/2865850.

Present Owner: P. H. Bouis, 916 East Madison, Brownsville, Texas, and Mrs. A. Berrera-Cuerra, 842 West St. Charles Street, Brownsville, Texas.

Present Occupant: Mr. and Mrs. Alonzo Sanchez.

Present Use: Rental property.

Significance: The Cross House is one of the best examples of the house form most typical of Brownsville in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These small wood frame structures are characterized by central halls with two rooms to either side, front porches, shuttered windows, and canted or double-pitched roofs supported by wooden posts. Built before 1906, the Cross House has floor-to-ceiling windows and an elaborate star-and-rinceau jigsaw decoration beneath the cornice of the front porch.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The house was erected by 1906 since it appears on a Sanborn Map of Brownsville dated January 1906. No more exact date has been obtained.
2. Architect: None known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The Cross House is located on Block 123, Lot 9 of the Original Townsite of Brownsville. The following references to the ownership of the property are found in the Cameron County Clerk's Office, Brownsville, Texas, as traced by Mary Lu Puckett:

1892 Warranty Deed dated June 17, 1892, recorded in Vol. I, pages 518-520. The New York Brownsville Improvement Company sold Lot 9 to Miss Columba Flores.

1901 Warranty Deed dated February 2, 1901, recorded in Vol. L, pages 158-159. Columbia T. de Garcia sold Lot 9 to Mrs. Jesus S. Cross.

1921 Warranty Deed dated March 3, 1921, recorded in Vol. 97, page 497 and following. Bertha Garcia and Jesus Garcia Vera sold Lot 9 to Roaa Knosel Dosal.

The property has remained in the Dosal family and is currently owned by P. H. Bouis, the husband of Anna Dosal, and by Mrs. A. Berrera-Guerra.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: According to P. H. Bouis, the house was built by Jesus Cross. Since Cross's family owned the J. S. & M. H. Cross Lumber Yard, it is probable that both materials and labor for the house were supplied from that business.
5. Original plans and construction: None known. The house is shown here, largely as it appeared in 1906 in the Sanborn Map of Brownsville, available at the City-College Library in Brownsville, Texas, and available also in the Library of Congress.
6. Additions and alterations: According to Mr. Bouis the shed roof addition to the rear of the house containing a bathroom, bedroom, and utility room was added in 1924.

B. Historical Events and Persons Associated with the Structure:

Jesus Cross was related to J. S. Cross. J. S. Cross and his son M. H. Cross came to Matamoros, Mexico, across the river from Brownsville in 1857. The Cross family ran a large dry goods store in Matamoros as well as a lumber yard in Brownsville. At one time they operated wholesale warehouses in both Brownsville and Matamoros. The Cross family at one time owned 3,000 acres in Cameron County. (Chatfield, pp. 21-22.)

After the death of Jesus Cross, Mrs. Cross married José LaPaz Garcia who was a Presbyterian minister. (P. H. Bouis.)

Rosa Knosel de Dosal was born of German parents in the United States. Her husband was from Santander in northern Spain. Rosa Dosal lived in the house until a few years before her death, of unknown date.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Telephone conversation with Mr. P. H. Bouis, 916 East Madison Street, Brownsville, Texas, on July 27, 1977. Mr. Bouis owns the house and was the son-on-law of Rosa Knosel Dosal. Mr. Bouis provided information on the occupants of the house and about alterations to the house.

Material for the Brownsville Architectural Historical Survey and Preservation Plan on file at the City Planning Office, Brownsville, includes chain of title from County Clerk's office.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Chatfield, W. H., The Twin Cities of the Border. Originally published in 1893. Reprinted in 1959 by the Harbert Davenport Memorial Fund, the Brownsville Historical Association, and the Lower Rio Grande Valley Historical Society.

Prepared by: Betty Bird
University of Virginia
Project Historian
1977

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This is a typical example of most of Brownsville's frame residential architecture with a canted or a double-pitched roofline and low porch across the facade.
2. Condition of fabric: Fair.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: Approximately forty-two feet across the five-bay front by fifty feet on the side, this one-story structure is of a rectangular plan.
2. Foundation: There is no foundation wall here but merely brick piers.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: Walls are covered with wood siding, and painted white, now badly flaking.
4. Structural system, framing: Structure is of wood frame construction throughout.
5. Porches, stoops, bulkheads, etc.: A low porch extends across the entire southwest front facade, having six square wooden pillars, wood floor and beaded-wood ceiling. The architrave has jigsaw decoration with stars and rinceau pattern, and there is a jigsaw corner bracket on each side of each column. This architrave and cornice extend around the ends of the porch. There is a console above each column just under the cornice. The porch is reached by one central wooden step. A small wooden porch platform with one wooden step leads to each of the two rear doors.

6. Chimneys: There is a brick chimney visible above the roof crest, near the southeast end of the house on the back side of the gable and just behind the ridge. The chimney has a projecting cap of three courses of brick, and two courses below is another brick two-course projection.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance in the center of the front facade is a wooden panel door with a segmental arched top panel of patterned frosted glass. There is a molded wood trim around the glass panel and the two lower raised panels. The door is flanked by half-height single-panel sidelights set over wooden panels, the whole then surmounted by a three-light, amber patterned glass transom above.

The rear entrance door to the kitchen is of flush panel tempered fibreboard with wood surrounds and threshold. The other rear door is a wood panel door with wood surrounds. All of the entrances have screen doors.

b. Windows and shutters: The floor-to-ceiling wooden windows on the front facade have two-over-four, double-hung sashes, wood surrounds, wood threshold and wood screens. The two extreme outside lateral windows have floor-to-ceiling shutters. Other windows have one-over-one lights and double-hung sashes. Some have vertical wood shutters and the rest have wood louvred shutters. There is a small, rectangular louvred ventilation opening in each gable end.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The main house block has a double-pitched roof extending into a flat roof over the front porch, and under the eaves a rear section with a shed roof. Roofs are shingled throughout. In the rear there is a small gable-roofed ell with wood shingles, and a shed roof along the rear covered with asphalt shingles.

b. Cornice, eaves: There is a boxed cornice on the gable roofs and an open cornice on the shed roof.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The entrance in the center of the southwest facade opens into a center hall. There is a door on each side of the hall, one leading to the living room and one leading to a bedroom. A doorway on the northeast of the center hall leads into the dining room. The living room has two floor-to-ceiling length windows on the southwest and two regular windows on the northwest. The bedroom on the right of the center hall has two floor-to-ceiling length windows on the southwest and two regular windows on the southeast.

The bedroom on the right of the center hall has two floor-to-ceiling windows on the southwest and two regular windows on the southeast.

There is a projecting fireplace on the northeast wall in the center. The deep wood surround has an arched opening and mantel with decorative work on the face—a painted tracery in imitation of gougework. The chimney exposed in the room is plastered. There is a hearth of concrete.

A door on the northeast wall leads into another bedroom. It has a fireplace backed up to the first one. The projecting wood surround has double wood brackets supporting the mantel. The wood surround ends at plinth blocks. The chimney here is also exposed in the room, and plastered. There is a double window on the southeast wall, a door on the northwest wall to the dining room, and a door on the northeast wall to a bedroom.

A back bedroom has a double window on the southeast and one window on the northeast. A door on the northwest leads to the bathroom.

The bathroom has a window on the northeast, a closet across the southwest and a door to a small utility room on the northwest.

The utility room has a door on the northeast leading outside and two doors on the northwest leading to the kitchen. A door on the southwest leads to the dining room.

The kitchen has a door on the northeast leading to the exterior, a window on the northwest, and a door on the southwest into the dining room.

The dining room, with a double window on the northwest wall, extends the length of the center hall and living room.

2. Flooring: Wood is used for flooring throughout, some covered with linoleum and carpet.
3. Walls and ceiling finish: Walls are of horizontal wood boards and beaded wood paneling. Ceilings are beaded wood paneling with a heavy cornice molding. The ceiling in the rear bedroom and bath slopes on each side. The walls and ceiling in the bathroom have gypsum board over the wood panel. Round wood ceiling medallions are in the center of the living room, center hall, and the front bedroom.
4. Doorways and doors: Doors are wood paneled with wood surrounds and thresholds. There is a three-light transom above the door from the dining room to the utility room.

5. Hardware and mechanical equipment:

- a. Heating: There is no heating equipment except fireplaces.
- b. Electrical: There are bare-bulb electric lights hanging in each room, some from wood ceiling medallions. In the living room is a hanging-light fixture beneath a wood medallion. It has a painted metal pendant at the medallion with a chain from each side extending down to a decorated arm. A small, decorated frosted shade hangs from each end of the arm.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house faces southwest on the northeast side of the street. There are residences on each side and across the street. A concrete sidewalk extends across the front of the property, with a small driveway on the southeast side of the house. The rear yard has a chain-link fence across the rear and also extending along the southeast side. On the northwest side is the wall of the adjoining property.

Prepared by: John P. White
Texas Technological
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Project Supervisor

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

At the suggestion of a national preservation consultant, Ellen Beasley, this project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) and the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, in cooperation with the Brownsville Historical Association and the Brownsville City Planning Department. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, the project was completed during the summer of 1977 at the Historic American Buildings Survey field office, Brownsville, Texas, by John P. White (Associate Professor, Texas Technological University) Project Supervisor; Betty Bird (University of Virginia) Project Historian; and Student Assistant Architects Scott Deneroff (University of Maryland), Susan Dornbusch (University of Virginia), Matthew Lowry (University of Pennsylvania), Eduardo Luaces (University of Florida), and Alan Willig (the City College of the City University of New York). Special assistance and support were provided to the HABS team by Mrs. Mary Simmons; Mrs. Sally Fleming, Miss Theresa Champion, and Mr. Calvin Walker of the Brownsville Historical Association; and by Mr. Mario Moreno, Mr. Richard Waldman, Mrs. Graciela Salinas, and Mr. Larry Brown of the Brownsville City Planning Department. Archival photographs of the project were made in February 1979 by Bill Engdahl, of Hedrich-Blessing, Chicago, Illinois. Editing and final preparation of the documentation was carried out in the HABS Washington office by Lucy Pope Wheeler of the HABS professional staff.